
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

The Official Journal
of the Association of
Assistant Librarians

CONTENTS

Council Notes	Page 83
Education for Librarianship	Page 84
Library Morale	Page 88
The Reference Group: A London Experiment	Page 92
Current Books	Page 93
Correspondence	Page 95
Valuations	Page 96

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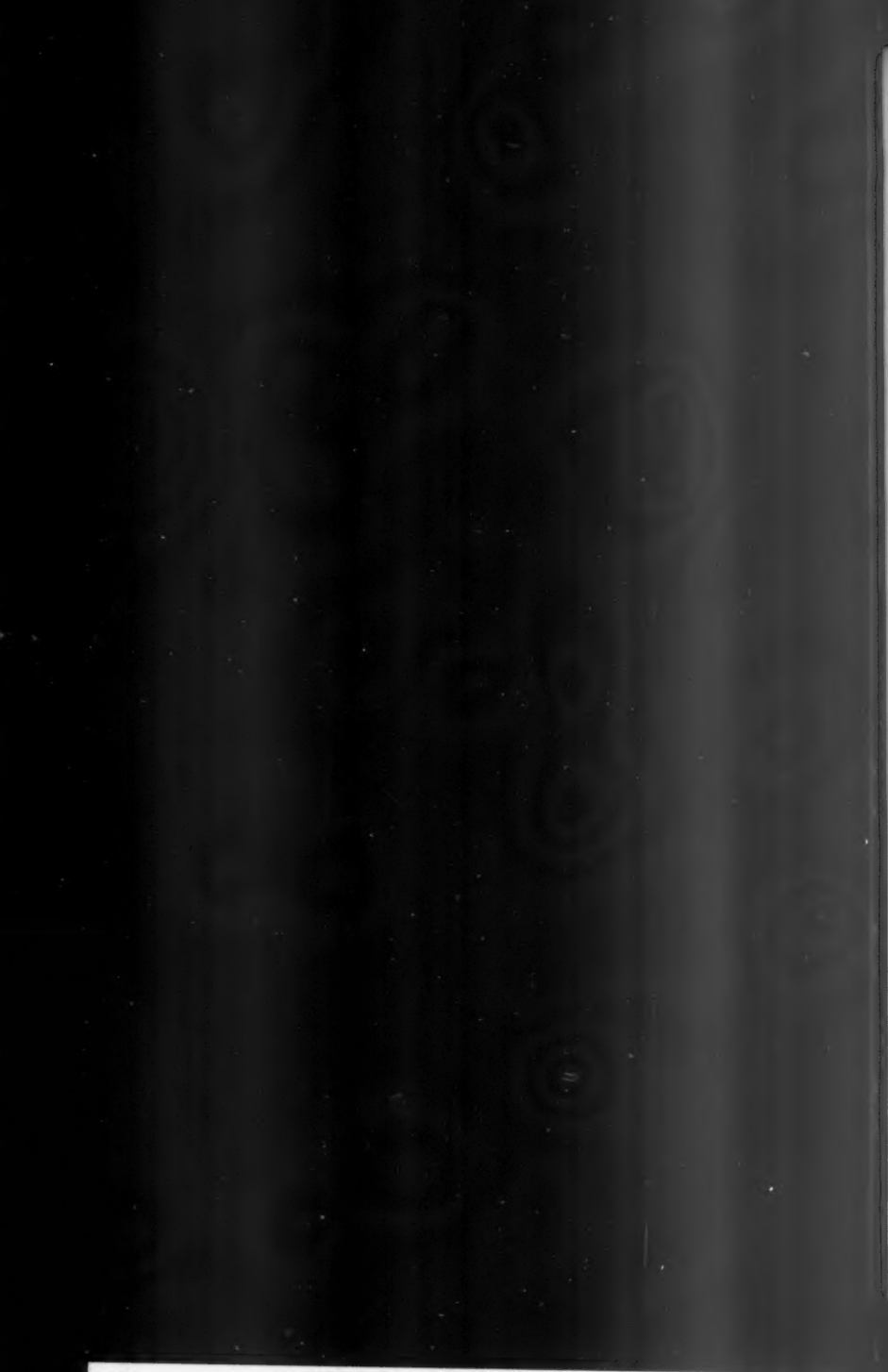
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THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS
(Section of the Library Association)

HON. EDITOR: W. B. STEVENSON

Hornsey Public Libraries

Council Notes

The A.A.L. Council met on 15th September, 1943, the President (Mr. F. M. Gardner) in the Chair.

The President reported on the Meeting of the A.A.L. delegates with the Library Association Post-War Policy Committee, and drew the attention of members to the fact that all the suggestions in the A.A.L. Memorandum (with the exception of those on book guidance and Regional Lending Libraries) had been included in the Draft Proposals to be submitted to the Library Association Council.

It was reported that the Proposals on post-war reorganization and development had been issued in printed form by the Library Association, and were to be submitted to the next meeting of the Library Association Council. Concern was expressed by many members of the A.A.L. Council that the members at large would have no opportunity of considering these Proposals before their public circulation. It was resolved that A.A.L. representatives on the Library Association Council should press for the Proposals to be treated as an Interim Report, to be circulated to all branches and sections for discussion. (Owing to circumstances beyond our control, this resolution was not considered by the L.A. Council, and the proposals have now been circulated to members and to the Press.)

The Secretary reported that the Ministry of Information were unable to make a place in their present programme for a film on Public Libraries, but were bearing the idea in mind.

It was resolved to send a delegate to a conference on "Adult Education after the War," which was being held on 29th-30th October under the auspices of the British Institute for Adult Education.

The Education Committee are to discuss the educational proposals now before the Library Association Council, and to report their findings to the next meeting of the A.A.L. Council.

The Library Association are to be urged to promote a campaign on the care of books, and to undertake the printing of the necessary publicity material.

W.B.S.

The Library Assistant

Education for Librarianship

G. E. Flack

ASK a number of library assistants why they decided to take up librarianship as a career, and their answers, given with some hesitation, will show that they have never really given the matter any serious consideration.

The all-too-frequent answer is that they like reading. Used aright a passion for reading may be an asset. But somehow one never seems to get down to the depths of the assistant's mind and just what influenced his choice of work. When persons just leaving school apply to me for a position in the Library, I try to persuade them to turn their attention to something with greater possibilities and more prospects.

But in spite of the poor prospects that confront the aspirant, to get into a library is his one intention. Do they imagine it is an easy and placid existence, or do they so dislike alternative occupations that library work at least presents more congenial prospects? And perhaps the word "interesting" best describes their view of the occupation. Such I am sure is not the viewpoint of any in this audience.

But once a member of a library staff, a keenness about the work seems soon to be awakened, and those who possess a considerable amount of initiative, perseverance and determination may attain to good positions. But for the majority a post in a library offers few prospects and the pay is bad, and I am convinced it will remain so under present conditions no matter how loud is the clamour for better salaries. Neither is there any reason to expect that financial conditions will be better after the war, in spite of a threatening shortage of persons to fill vacancies in libraries. I am not going to enter into the question of salaries. The argument has always been that you must improve the salaries of library assistants and librarians before you can hope to attract the right type into the service. Some improvement has been made in this direction; whether it has been accompanied by the attraction of the right type of person remains in question. You may argue that the salaries have not been increased sufficiently, but will they be increased much more? I am very doubtful on that point. I think the attitude to the problem is wrong. Instead of saying improve the conditions and you will get the person you want, I would say first get the person you want, educate him and train him, and improvement in conditions can be made to follow. There will have to be some sacrifice on the part of the individual for a time. The changed outlook, the education and the training have to be tried and proved, but any sacrifice is better than the beating of the air that has been going on far too long.

Look for a moment at the present position and ask yourself what justification you have for a claim for improvement in salaries. The junior assistant enters a library with School Leaving Certificate or equivalent, and proceeds to pass the Elementary Examination of the Library Association by study in spare time, often without guidance. Many fail to pass at the first sitting. They may make a further attempt, some with the same result. Now it is at this point a big mistake is often made. Too often a benevolent librarian will allow an assistant, after two or three failures to pass the examination, to remain on the staff, excusing himself by saying that the assistant does useful work, but he does not consider the harm he is doing both the assistant and the profession by so doing. Of course, it would be simpler if the unfortunate assistant spared the Chief Librarian trouble and resigned to seek employment for which he was better

The Library Assistant

fitted. The longer that assistant remains on the staff the less the chances of his finding more suitable employment.

Those who have successfully passed the Elementary examination pass on to the Intermediate. It is not an easy examination, and the amount of reading required to be done is considerable, and often heavy. This again has to be done in spare time, frequently after strenuous days when the mind is dulled and the body is tired, to say nothing of the persistent calls of outside attractions. Is it any wonder that the assistant does just enough, and only enough, work to pass the examination, and heaves a sigh of relief when it is over? What is the value of study under conditions such as these? Is any real lasting knowledge gained under such conditions?

The study for the Final examination is pursued under similar conditions. Generally speaking, the period of study for each part is considerably protracted, as it needs to be, but even so, much of the value to the individual and through the individual to his profession is nullified by spare-time study. Credit is due to all who under such conditions attain the highest qualifications the Library Association has to offer, but taken at its face value, what is it worth? I measure its worth in terms of the increased value of that assistant in the service of the public as well as to the library, and not only to the latter. The student may now be versed in the technicalities of his subject, and can put them to good use in his daily work, which is making available the resources at his command. But the public wants more, it needs more, and it deserves more.

The type of person needed in libraries today is the one who is capable not merely of giving information as to where things can be found, but of being able to appreciate the other person's difficulties, providing him with a fresh outlook on the problem in hand and guiding him into channels which will lead to the solution.

This is the person who can demand an adequate salary and will get it. Put people of this type in your library—your library will live, and the library service will have no need to advertise, it will become a real service, and that which has been striven for for so long—adequate pay—will not be long before being realized.

How is this going to be realized? Not by Library Association examinations, no matter how they are reformed, but by a definite planning for a career.

Such a person is not produced from one whose education terminated at 17 or 18 years of age, and after some years in a library passes the examination of the Library Association. That person may be well equipped for the technical side of librarianship, but he is so imbued with technical data that it becomes an obsession. His outlook, his thoughts, his discussion, are of the technicalities of his job. He is a technician versed in the details of his occupation, but one whose education finished at 17 years of age. What of those subjects that were followed so assiduously until the School Certificate Examination was passed? How many have been kept up? In how many is there even a lingering interest? They are all things of the past—subjects studied in order to pass an examination. Since then the mind has been occupied with other matters, and no threads remain which can be picked up. Is it surprising that the library assistant has little to interest him beyond his own occupation? How can such a person know and appreciate the difficulties that confront the student who comes to him for help? What service is he able to render such a person, having never had to face similar difficulties himself?

Presidential Address delivered before the North Midland Branch of the Library Association.

The Library Assistant

But that is the position today. There is no Education for Librarianship, only technical training.

I have called this paper "Education for Librarianship." Much has been said and written on this subject, but all have missed the point that it is not Education *for* Librarianship that they have in mind, but Education *in* Librarianship—which can be a totally different matter. What, then, is Education for Librarianship, and how can it be achieved? I have spoken of the education of an entrant into Librarianship today as finishing at 17–18 years. In order to fit that person to assist the library user he must pursue his studies in one or two subjects to the stage of Higher Education, as well as in making himself proficient in the technicalities of the profession. This can only be achieved by setting up Schools of Librarianship at Universities and University Colleges throughout the country. Mr. McColvin in his Report advocated the setting up of such schools, but he had in mind the bugbear of having to achieve distinction in the profession by studying in spare time and the cultural advantages to be gained by attending the school. So far I am in full agreement with him, but why stop there? The teacher attending a training college is taught more than how to teach: he has to continue two or more subjects from the stage where the school instruction ended and take an advanced course in one subject and an ordinary course in several others. So with librarians: they, too, should carry on their studies in one or more subjects to an advanced stage. Not only will they be able to assist students in those subjects who come to the library for help, but by virtue of the fact that they have themselves met and overcome difficulties that lay in their path so they will be able to assist others no matter what the topic is.

It would, of course, be necessary to select the right type of person for such training. The selection would be such that it would determine that the candidate is likely to benefit by attendance at the School, that he possesses those characteristics essential in a librarian such as order, method, adaptability and aptitude for bibliographical research; such candidates must have London Matriculation or similar qualification. The course at such a school would be of two years' duration, at the end of which time successful candidates would be awarded a certificate, to be followed, after a further year's satisfactory service at an approved library, by the award of a diploma. University Graduates would only be required to take one year's course at the school, and a further year's satisfactory service at an approved library would qualify them for the Diploma.

Subjects which ought to be included in the curriculum are History, Psychology, Economics, Logic and Social Science. The reason is apparent, but look for a moment at one or two of them and see the degree to which they would be an asset to the library assistant.

Consider Psychology. We are making great strides today in the provision of children's libraries and school libraries, but how many persons know how to treat children and how to talk to them? I am sure if they overheard some of the children's opinion about libraries they would take immediate steps to understand better the child mind. And again, History. I know you will say, "I learnt it at school," but school History amounts to little more than facts and figures. Such things have to be mastered before proceeding to higher things, but History of higher standard develops the correlation of facts, and its ramifications stretch far and wide. And then Economics. You may have considered to some degree the question of library finance. In fact, I am pretty sure that wages have at some time entered into your discussion, but do you ever look outside and consider library finance in its relation to the financial structure of the country?

The Library Assistant

I could go on at some length indicating the value of study in these subjects to the potential librarian. There is, however, another aspect upon which I should like to speak regarding the value of Schools of Librarianship, and that is the cultural value. Most assistants in libraries today have come straight from school. They have become self-centred and introspective, and think of little else than the job in hand. Their minds are cramped. In the school they would be in contact with others of their own age with various interests and ideas. There would be a free exchange of ideas and all the cultural advantages of academic life would be theirs. I do not advocate that a student attending a School of Librarianship should take a large number of subjects additional to the usual professional ones. The number ought to be limited to two, of which one will be the main subject and the other the subsidiary. In the former, studies will be pursued until an advanced knowledge of the subject is obtained. The person who has mastered one subject thoroughly is much more likely to be sympathetic and helpful to others who are pursuing the same process in another subject than one who has dived into several subjects and gained but a superficial knowledge in every one. The aim is to extend the understanding of the methods used in the transmission and distribution of knowledge and of preserving and making them available for use.

I have said that the Diploma should be awarded only upon the completion of one year's satisfactory service in an approved library. But this is not the only practical work I advocate. I would suggest that two periods of six weeks' duration in each year spent at the School should be spent in a library. Thereby the student would gain practical experience in the application of his theoretical studies as they progress. I have only given an outline of what I consider to be an education for Librarianship. But I hope I have gone far enough to make you realize the advantages not only to the individual for whose sake alone it would be worth while, but to library service in general. You have tried to make the Library Association realize the necessity for improved financial conditions of libraries, and the Association has done what it can to improve matters, but it cannot do the impossible. Mr. McColvin has advocated that library staffs should be paid at the same rate as the teaching profession, but how can such an argument be pressed to a satisfactory conclusion when there is no comparison between the educational attainments required by the respective professions. There is a demand for better assistants today; after the war there will be innumerable vacancies for such people, but where are they coming from?

Such Education for Librarianship can only be achieved if the Library Association is made to realize the demand for Schools of Librarianship and to use all the power it can command with the Board of Education to bring such Schools into being.

We are all more or less familiar with the McColvin Report, and with the passage of time our first reactions, favourable or unfavourable, have settled down so as to enable us to take a cold, matter of fact view of it. We still await the views of the Library Association, but whatever they may be, it is at least certain that the library system of the country is about to undergo radical changes. There is another thing that is certain, and that is that these changes will come gradually.

I have no need to remind you that conditions are not so very different from those of the last war. We may say that we were unprepared for the end, and had not got our plans formulated. We think we are doing better this time in that we are looking ahead and getting plans settled for what is to be done when peace comes. But what we omitted to do in the last war we are over-doing in this, and the result may be just as disastrous. Everywhere grandiose plans are being made—there is no need for me to tell you about them. But the sum total of all the proposals is so colossal that if we

The Library Assistant

are not careful few of these plans will ever come to fruition because in no case have modified alternative ideas been put forward such as can be put into immediate operation. That is what I have felt about the McColvin Report. I would like to see the education for librarianship taken up seriously and wholeheartedly. In other words, begin by putting our houses in order inside; once you have a sufficient personnel so educated and trained you will be able to fill the posts that will be created by the carrying out of a fuller programme of reorganization. It is already being whispered that the Government would not consider any reorganization of the library service on the lines of the McColvin Report as being of sufficient importance for attention after the war in view of the larger schemes with which it will then be confronted. One thing is certain, and that is that there will be State aid for men and women released from the Forces to enable them to continue their education, and grants for those likely to benefit from a University education. Here is the opportunity for the Library Association to go forward with a scheme for Education for Librarians such as I have outlined. I am convinced that it would receive sympathetic consideration from the right quarter and, what is more, it would pave the way for the reorganization so greatly needed in the library service of today.

Library Morale

J. F. W. Bryon

MILITARY communiqués often mention that "The morale of our troops is high." It is considered important. Reports on the Library Front never allude to this, but I consider that they should. For on the morale of our troops depends their conduct in action. Soldiers made sluggish and unresponsive by controllable hardships, forgetfulness of their seniors and unnecessarily bad conditions are not so effective as those who are alert because those in authority are mindful of these things. Similarly, how library assistants feel about their training, prospects and conditions is important as bearing on the quality of public service they will provide.

Staff morale varies with library systems, as it does with military units. Some of the factors which decide whether it shall be good or bad are considered below under three broad heads. As military morale is conditioned by confidence in and familiarity with equipment, superior officers and prospects, so in the library staff morale is similarly affected by confidence in and familiarity with equipment (books, classification and catalogue), superior officers and prospects.

Esprit de corps is an over-invoked phrase, but it is applicable in this case. But what is the *corps* whose *esprit* is to be considered? We may not be parochial in so universal a profession as librarianship. The pride we nurture in our staff should be roused not merely in the service of our own community, but also in the international and super-national service of librarianship. Passing examinations is not enough; we must have a sense of vocation as well—a belief in the importance of our duties.

To this end we need an A.B.C.A. for librarians in peace-time. For the benefit of those who are still practising their civilian tasks, A.B.C.A. is the organization whereby serving soldiers are enabled to discuss collectively the aims and ideals of their fighting and the means whereby those ends are to be attained. We should encourage staff meetings to consider not only internal and routine problems, but also the wider issues

The Library Assistant

involved in their activities. This should be a proper sphere of A.A.L. action—the preparation and circulation of monthly bulletins containing general and particular articles and questionnaires to aid the leaders and conveners of library staff meetings and study groups, thus to canalize the thought of assistants throughout the country in current matters. If assistants know, and are not merely made to feel, that what they think counts, and that their views receive proper representation on Area Committees and the like, then there will be a wider and deeper interest in vital decisions, and not the normal cynicism which affects to ignore all major issues, because morale will be good.

On one fact theorists agree—that morale is not *decided* by conditions, but merely accentuated by them. Necessary hardship is borne with equanimity by troops whose morale is high. Likewise there is a tendency to deterioration of morale in any unit which has reason to believe that the adversity they undergo was avoidable. Morale is, virtually, a mutual faith between senior and junior, borne of confidence in and respect for each by either.

Another salient factor is the question of inaction. Passive librarianship breeds passive librarians, unable because unaccustomed to positive practice of their theoretical credo. Nothing so dulls the professional mind and deadens the spirit as lack of policy and absence of plan. Let there be a progressive spirit of action in our libraries, and let the staff be in on it, eager to participate because encouraged to bring forward suggestions. It will not be a sign of weakness, but of strength, if we lubricate staff relations, with the twin objects of making our colleagues contented with their lot and effective in their work, linked with the borrowing public and with associates in other libraries in mutual friendship and co-operation, so that at all times they may be able and prepared to serve.

Some of the things affected by morale are the presence or lack of an inclination to take examinations or participate in Association activities and staff meetings, as well as the more directly local considerations of proneness to grumble, standards of punctuality and willingness to forgo privileges. Seniors have an important part to play in this as in other aspects of staff relations—by example and by demeanour. Internecine squabbles or branch feuds may have a disastrous effect on public service and a tactful intervention should be imposed immediately such come to light, always remembering the depth to which such feelings can be roused by matters apparently trivial in their origin. Arbitration should never be arbitrary.

But juniors are apt to forget their own responsibility in this respect also, and should curb an innate tendency to take unfair advantage of privileges granted, and grumble without proper investigation or grounds. One disgruntled junior assistant may wreck the good feeling between a dozen colleagues and affect the standards of a whole library system.

Three human needs have to be taken into consideration by those concerned with staff morale, those of the body, the mind and the spirit. The old tag of *mens sana in corpore sano* can hardly apply if a junior is compelled to operate on a time-table with split duties wrecking all opportunities of physical recreation. Evening work and long hours of exclusively mental activity are an exacting strain on young people, and when those duties are accompanied by voluntary study for examinations, progress in either duties or studies is not facilitated by a time sheet which precludes all but the barest minimum of sport or exercise.

The mind, too, needs recreation. Assistants should be encouraged to take an intelligent and active interest in local societies—historical, topographical, archaeological,

The Library Assistant

artistic, scientific or literary. Such individual contacts will be useful not only to the assistant, but also to the society and the library, the one finding a new ally, the other a further outlet for its potential energies, and both deriving a mutual benefit. Film, music, horticultural, dramatic societies, linked with books by such means, become propagandists for the library, and every member of the staff so acting as an ambassador widens the effective radius of the stock.

How are the spiritual needs of the assistant to be met? They cannot, but steps can be taken to ensure that they are not increased. The integrity of librarianship must be beyond question. Malpractice in any form—the easy way, the sops to conscience, the glib statistics, the base selection standards, will affect the conscientiousness of the junior assistant, who judges the ethics of the profession by our actions, not by our annual reports.

One important point must be stressed. No library service can be called good if its public reputation is obtained at the expense of staff amenities and welfare. The care of subordinates is as effective a measure of a senior's ability as his careful administrative work, and should come before his own personal comfort and convenience. Most staffs are willing cheerfully to enjoy anything unavoidable, but are easily discouraged if they feel that their hardships are caused by red tape, inefficiency or lack of understanding rather than necessity. A good rule to follow is "Explain the irksome." And as a rider to this—the greater the measure of equality in sacrifice, the greater the willingness. Saturday evening should not be the invariable prerogative of senior staff members.

How long is it since you had a staff meeting? And if they are held regularly, how long is it since you attended? To what extent are you in touch with your juniors, how often do you meet them, ask them their opinions on innovations proposed, or canvass their ideas? They have to operate the rules, meet the public and hear their comments. Are they passed to you? You were a junior once. Democracy can work, and you, benevolent autocrat, are the only one in a position to give it a fair trial.

When were you last in the staff room? And would you enjoy having it as your only refuge in your off-duty periods? When I was young my room at home was considered a fit receptacle for all the unwanted family photographs, furniture and ornaments in the household, much to my resentment, and library staff rooms often remind me of that period, redolent as they are of years unknown. Group photographs of the First Annual Conference, with "The Chief," a pink-cheeked lad in the back row, superannuated editions and unwelcome presentations tend to clutter up this Cinderella of library design. Its furnishing, decoration and equipment are rarely adequate and never lavish. Cooking facilities exist not at all in many instances and, far from being a haven, the room becomes a white elephant, in which all the junk awaiting collection by the salvage men congregates. Such things depress the staff and affect the library service.

It is surprising in how many authorities the scale of salaries in the Libraries Department is different from that obtaining for the staff of the Borough Treasurer, Town Clerk or Medical Officer for Health, and the difference is never in favour of the library assistant. Why this should be so, when the L.A. examinations are just as hard as those of the I.M.T.A. or C.I.S., I don't understand. But that it is so, and has been for some considerable while, is a recognized fact, and one that casts a slur on the profession as a whole. Seniors, and more particularly Chief Librarians, should do all that is

The Library Assistant

in their power to remove this slight in their own locality, and the Library Association would do well to make its general abolition a cardinal point in their post-war policy. Its continuance is not merely a reflection on the value of our work ; it is also a deterrent to potential recruits.

Hours of duty are not customarily onerous in total, but their incidence and span may be so. And in your careful consideration of the time sheet, take into account the opinions of those it affects. They will respond to your acknowledgment of their significance, and you may be offered a solution which may vary considerably from the accepted routine, but will be effective because acceptable to the majority. An example may help here. There is one system where juniors agitated for longer days, without split duties, and one complete day off per week, in addition to Sundays, while maintaining the same total number of hours. Because it never had been done, it wasn't instituted until the war took all the senior staff members into the Services and those remaining arranged things as they pleased. The result has been a considerable improvement in morale.

Examinations mean text-books. Their provision is, or should be, normal in all library systems. But there should be encouragement from the library authority to the individual assistant to buy his own set, for duplication to any great extent is inadvisable, and much delay and trouble will be saved the assistant if he has a copy of all the essential works, while the authority maintains a stock of the supplementary and more expensive text books for use as occasion arises. This is a matter properly dealt with on a national basis, but pending the institution of some students' contributory scheme by the L.A., a local authority can easily begin its own simple plan, by some modified system of hire-purchase, the library providing the initial stock, and the student repaying the cost by deductions from salary.

All the above considerations are local, and can be effected or remedied by local action. But there is the greater problem of Library Morale in the country as a whole. Library assistants, whether in the Forces or practising their profession, are coming to be aware of the insignificant part they are considered to play, and the worthlessness of their duties, in public eyes, by the lack of recognition given to the Library Association by the various Government Ministries. In the vacillation concerning the de-reservation of librarians, in the by-passing of the L.A. on the questions of books for the Forces and salvage, and so on, members are apt to see ill omens for the future. Not until the Association attains its rightful place in the agencies of post-war planning, and not until it is a recognized public force in the world of English books, will its members be contented and their morale good. We need an assurance that our interests will at all times and in all circumstances be guarded, and that those whom we elect shall be able to control our professional destiny, and not let outside bodies do our work, ignore our existence and claim credit for our achievement.

Like civilians in war-time, librarians will do anything—IF they are told why and have an incentive. We must encourage initiative in our juniors, not subservience. Does that sound very Communist? Does the bogey of insubordination still haunt us? If so, then it speaks ill of our standards of staff welfare, and staff morale is not likely to be high while we allow such fears and inhibitions to cramp our service.

I look forward to a post-war revitalization of librarianship, in which junior assistants will be the prime movers, attending branch, group and staff meetings, making their individual decisions and controlling their own lives. It should be possible for each area to have a panel of experts on library topics, who could attend these public meetings and place the alternatives before the members, thus ensuring a wiser decision than one reached without guidance.

The Library Assistant

The Reference Group: A London Experiment

I. Smith

IT was in November, 1938, that I received a letter from Mr. J. W. Perry, who was then in charge of the reference library at Paddington, asking if I would be willing to attend a meeting to discuss ways in which London's reference libraries might co-operate. I answered enthusiastically. This, and other replies, resulted in a meeting at Chaucer House of assistants from twenty reference libraries in the London area. It was decided at this meeting to form an Association restricted to persons engaged or interested in reference library work. Its objects were to be to promote co-operation, to provide a means of exchanging reference queries and difficulties, and to improve the status of reference library assistants. Four months later, Mr. Perry called a second meeting, when he told us that the Library Association was prepared to recognize us as the Reference Group of the London and Home Counties Branch. He was asked to be our first Honorary Secretary-Treasurer, and Mr. J. L. Luck, of Bethnal Green, and Mr. W. H. C. Moreton, of Shoreditch, were elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively. The rules of the Group were drawn up. A sub-committee was appointed to start on the Group's first co-operative effort—a union list of annuals and directories available in the libraries of Greater London. Thus was a new venture launched.

During the first year of the war, the Group met three times. Many subjects were discussed, and papers were read on "The Circularization of Unanswered Queries," "Reference Library Work at Broadcasting House," and "The Initial Stock of a Small Reference Library."

By the rules of the Group, the annual general meeting takes place in November, but in 1940 this was prevented by the blitz conditions which were then prevailing. However, it was held in the New Year, when Mr. E. R. McColvin of the Polytechnic Library—the newly-elected Chairman—read a paper on "The Student User of the Reference Library." The air raid siren rudely interrupted the discussion which followed this paper, but this did not prevent us from thoroughly enjoying the tea which was provided later! Mr. Moreton, who had taken over the duties of Honorary Secretary, arranged one more meeting—at which he read a paper on "Library Co-operation in London Now and After the War"—before he followed his predecessor into the Army.

For nearly a year the records of the Group remained "stored," and during this time several more of our original members were called for the Services, but in March, 1942, eleven members met and decided unanimously that in spite of war-time difficulties the Group should carry on.

Since then, papers have been read on "Reference Library Problems After the War," "The Place of the Reference Librarian in Plans for a Better World," "The Training of Reference Library Assistants," "Any Questions?" "Do Men or Women Make Better Reference Library Assistants?" "Reference Library Co-operation and Co-Ordination," "The Reference Library as an Information Bureau," "A Junior Assistant's Impressions of a Reference Library" and "Public Library Picture Collections."

Each of the above papers has led to lively discussion, and action has been taken on matters arising from some of them. The Library Association has been asked to keep a watchful eye on reference libraries which are still closed to the public for various war-time reasons. It has also been asked to consider the possible inclusion

The Library Assistant

in its Examination Syllabus of papers on Elementary Reference Book Knowledge and Advanced Public Reference Library Administration; and a special sub-committee of the Group has drawn up a list of subjects which could be included under the latter heading. The Union list of annuals and periodicals has been completed in five sections which are available for use at Chiswick, Croydon, East Ham, Edmonton and the Guildhall; copying work is going ahead, and each of these libraries will have shortly a complete record for the whole area. These "housing" libraries have undertaken to supply information as to the whereabouts of specific annuals or directories; and have also agreed to act as "clearing houses" for unanswered queries within their "sections." An article on reference libraries by the Group's Vice-Chairman is now appearing monthly in the *Library World*. A regular feature of the Group's meetings is the reporting by members of important and interesting items which have been added to their stocks.

I hope this account of a scheme which was launched at so inauspicious a moment in the world's history, and which is being tested in such difficult times, has interested you. It has been written as a tribute to our early members, who are now serving with H.M. Forces, as an invitation to assistants in Greater London to come to our meetings, and a challenge to assistants further afield to organize similar schemes in their own areas. It is in such times as the present that so many assistants, new to reference library work, need the helpful co-operation of the few experienced assistants left in our reference libraries. It is now that we should get together, taking stock and comparing notes, so that the replenishing of stocks which must take place after the war shall be rationally planned having regard to what is available in nearby libraries.

Current Books

A Batsford century. Batsford. 10s. 6d.

This fine book, "a record of a hundred years of publishing and bookselling," marks the centenary of a great publishing firm. Reading through the book and noting the many standard works which the firm have published, we may echo James Agate's comment that "Messrs. Batsford's ought to be bankrupt"; we may also rejoice that their policy has triumphed and that they continue to publish good books. As befits a commemorative volume, the paper and casing are of the finest, and will arouse a yearning for pre-war "non-austerity" standards.

CARYL BRAHMS. A study of Robert Helpmann. Photographs by Russell Sidgwick. Batsford. 18s.

It may seem early yet to devote a book to a choreographer who has produced only three ballets, but this is a record of something more: the emergence of a truly English ballet from Sadlers Wells—a triumph after the trials of the last ten years. The ballets *Hamlet*, *Comus*, and *The birds* are fully discussed, with criticism of the dancers, the *decor* and the choreography. Miss Brahms writes with intelligence and vivacity, and the seventy odd photographs are excellent. Here is a book for all balletomanes and most libraries.

H. B. CRESWELL. The Honeywood file. Faber. 8s. 6d.

An architect's file regarding the building of a house seems unpromising material, but the author brings to his subject such a wealth of knowledge and a fund of humour that the characters escape from the filing cabinet and take life. Spinlove, the young architect; Sir Leslie Brash, the too-dignified client; Grigblay, the builder; all of them are delightful, and the reader is the better for having known them. At the same

The Library Assistant

time he will have learnt what sound building means, its detail, its crafts, and its values. Here is a minor classic, worthy of the highest recommendation.

WALTER DE LA MARE. *Love: an anthology*. Faber. 25s.

This book, with its fine paper, its decorations by Barnet Freedman and its beautiful typography, is a joy to the eye and an oasis in the desert of austerity production. The long introduction by de la Mare is full of wisdom and that whimsical charm which he has made his own. The anthology, which ranges the centuries and ransacks the literature of the world, runs to 500 pages, and has been compiled with unique taste and discretion. Many of the extracts will be unfamiliar except to the scholar. This is undoubtedly one of the most original and finely produced books of the year.

ARNOLD L. HASKELL. *The National Ballet*. Black. 10s. 6d.

Mr. Haskell deals more generally with the subject on which Miss Brahms particularizes—the Sadlers Wells Ballet. Having always been highly—and deservedly—critical of the company, this present tribute comes with all the more weight. Mr. Haskell examines the repertoire and the dancers, gives a history of the company's achievement, and a full list of the ballets and choreographers. An excellent little critical bibliography concludes an able and valuable book.

JOHN MORRIS. *Traveller from Tokio*. Cresset Press. 10s. 6d.

The author was a lecturer in English at one of the Universities in Tokio, and remained there for a year after Japan had declared war. He gives a vivid account of Japanese manners and customs and comes to the conclusion that only utter and conclusive defeat will convince the Japanese that they have lost the war. His description of Japanese "law" gives weight to his conclusions, and his analysis of the methods of the police show the docility of the population. A most interesting book, valuable for its unbiased views on the Japanese people.

PENGUINS. 9d. each.

Preoccupied with crown octavo, we often forget how many and how valuable are the paper-covered editions. Among the new Penguins recently published may be mentioned the following first publications: Three good anthologies—Treble's *Narrative poems of the XIX century*, Hancock and Steele's *Modern Irish short stories*, Hugh Sykes Davies' *The poets and their critics* (original and stimulating). Then there is H. E. Bates' collection of his *Spectator* articles, *Country life*, and among re-issues Plomer's *Paper houses*, London's *Mutiny of the Elsinore*, Bowen's *Friends and relations*, Galsworthy's *The patrician*, Faulkner's curious detective story, *The nebuly coat*, and Waugh's *Put out more flags*. It is quite possible that the issue of re-bound Penguins may be the solution of our "out of print" problem—soon they may be the only available editions of many excellent books.

F. SEYMOUR SMITH. *An English library*. National Book Council. 2s.

A book list that was really necessary, done with the highest ability by a librarian. This list of the English classics, from Chaucer to James Joyce, is a notable piece of work, accurate, painstaking and reasonably complete. The annotations, perhaps too few in number, are a model of their kind, and the N.B.C. should have our gratitude for sponsoring a work which will be endlessly useful to the student, the plain man, and to the librarian.

The Library Assistant

Correspondence

The Editor,

The Library Assistant.

Sir,—

In my three years' experience of library service—in most respects a very happy one—it strikes me that we are still throwing away valuable opportunities of "customer contact," and concentrating far too much on the subtleties of classification and cataloguing, which, with other doubtful practices, are most comfortably indulged in "behind office walls." For instance, the Citizens' Advice Bureau should surely be situated, whenever possible, where the wisest citizens have always come for advice—the public library (usually via books, it is true, than via harassed be-Dew-eyed assistant).

I am prompted to write this partly by the fact that a friend of mine had to wait 15 minutes recently while a large London railway terminus answered an enquiry—one which we could have answered in as many seconds. The London libraries, at least, need never be at a loss to answer as to "What's on" and other more general enquiries, when they can secure such effective and simple means as displaying Max Henrichsen's excellent *On leave in London*, distributed by the London Regional Committee for Education among H.M. Forces.

The library assistant has an important and pivotal position in the relationship of Books to Life. But he may have to come forward a little sometimes to lend a helping hand over the barrier that sometimes separates them.

Yours faithfully,

ERIC J. BATSON.

The Editor,

The Library Assistant.

Sir,—

R.A.F.

The September-October number of *The Library Assistant* has just reached me here, and I feel, firstly, I should write and say how much I appreciate the contact with our professional affairs which otherwise tend to get completely forgotten in the hectic existence of an A.C.2.

My other pretext for writing is the letter from Signm. Keyworth. He is of the opinion that a special section of the L.A. might be advantageous to serving members, and, to a certain extent, I agree that somebody might well represent the considerable number of us who are no longer in civilian clothes. At the same time I cannot but feel that it would be of far greater effect were it possible to persuade the Library Association to appoint one (or more) of its Council to act as liaison officer to whom our opinions could be addressed and by whom representations could be made to the appropriate quarters.

We have all appreciated in the last years that unity is strength, and it seems to me that a special Forces Section, which could in present circumstances be but a scattered body with no central force, would be far less desirable than a single representative of adequate standing.

I am, Sir,

Yours faithfully,

R. NORTHWOOD LOCK.

The Library Assistant

Valuations

M. L. Jackson

THERE is a Yorkshire expression, "Neither nowt nor summat," which would sufficiently describe some short notes and lyrical passages which introduce book titles to the public. Such a term would apply to many useless appendages which bespatter library book lists:—"Stories of a spiritual odyssey," "Full of interest," "For the technician," or (for junior consumption) "A story woven of starlight and moonshine." Better to say nothing than cull from the book jacket one of a reviewer's least telling phrases.

Bethnal Green's "Notable books of 1942" is a good selection, printed in one alphabetical sequence in cheerful red type on good white paper. In the monthly book lists, *Bethnal Green's* annotations are useful and friendly, though occasionally they are slightly confused (*vide* the astonishing piece of camouflage from Stevie Smith who, in her poems and sketches "masks a philosophy of life beneath a cloak of humour"). I am sorry that the fiction is not annotated, because *Candleford Green*, listed in the fiction, would certainly appeal to the reader who likes *Country hoard*, described in the non-fiction. *Croydon's* "Reader's Index" annotates most of the fiction titles, but not Pember's *Not me, sir*. This is a pity, considering the number of people who shy violently from analysis of the adolescent mind.

Tottenham, wisely, I think, leaves out new technical books from its general lists, on the argument that the reader of technical books is better served by a full specialized catalogue. I still maintain that the type is poor and the annotations mean and miserable in size in the *Islington* bulletins, although it is claimed for the type that it allows for the printing of more titles to a page. Less titles, more information and an attractive appearance are qualities in a list which are more likely to appeal to the reader. Apart from this drawback of size, the annotations to *Islington* lists are generally wise and to the point. There is a most useful reference to the *County of London plan*, which explains the ready availability of copies in the Lending and Reading Rooms.

It was some time before I got to the book list in *Loughborough's* "Reader's Guide," having been swept off my feet by the breezy introduction of the new librarian to his public. To allay fears roused by the heading "Under new management," the assurance is given that no changes will take place which will disturb the reader (and, anyway, it is still Bolton, the old firm). The fiction in the book list is annotated, and in such a way that the favourites are marked out for the winner-spotter—"Daily Sketch book of the week," and "Book Society choice" (this for *War and Peace*, which is now securely established with Beethoven's Fifth as a good thing). I think that the reader would be more grateful to know that *A finger in every pie* is a good selection of short stories rather than that it was among that unequal assembly of the blessed named "T.L.S. first choice."

Among the book lists on special subjects, *Luton's* "Books on Russia" is an admirable achievement. The cover is impressive, but what I like most about the list is the introductory talk. The compiler describes the pendulum swing between the too-carping and the super-adulatory book on Russia. He mentions the more detached and reasoned critics, recommends Zoschenko as a relief from the more humourless accounts

The Library Assistant

of present-day Soviet life, and praises Ilin as a writer for the young. The books in the list are well and fully described, and they cover the history of Russia, family life, education, the arts and Russia at war.

In the handbook which *Bristol* issued for the Southey centenary, this reference to Southey is quoted: "That admirable, erudite and indefatigable man." These three adjectives might well apply to the *Bristol* publications, for this Southey bibliography is a fine and scholarly work, prefaced by an interesting account of Southey's life. Another good book list from *Bristol* is "Rebuilding Britain," which includes a section on town planning in special areas, listed alphabetically by the place, and which gives full reference to periodicals and year books containing information on the subject. *Bristol's* public lectures continue to thrive. For each a folder is issued which gives biographical details of the speaker and a list of books which are about the subject of the lecture. Again, I feel that it is a mistake to list so many titles when a few could be recommended and still the range be indicated of the reading matter available. For instance, in the "Select list of books on art," Williams-Ellis's *Britain and the beast* and Lancaster's *Pillar to post* appear in the alphabetical sequence with no indication of the scope of the former or the style of the latter.

Cardiff's list "From garden to kitchen" is like all *Cardiff's* small lists—handy, fresh-looking and business-like. All aspects of feeding and amateur food-production are covered, and the vegetables are carefully classified—Root, Pod, Green, etc.

The list on "Management and labour" from *Sheffield* must be invaluable to works managers and all who have to control labour. In it are shown the most useful books and periodical references which deal with such problems as wages, holidays, conditions of service, hours, absenteeism, etc. The list is a thick duplicated one and bears on its cover a large face, which shows all the symptoms of a disillusioned foreman.

Annual reports show that most libraries are having to cope with very high issues with depleted and untrained staffs.

At *Bournemouth*, where issues are up at the branches and down at the Central Library, the issues for the last year were 2,240,000. *Bootle's* daily average is 1,606, as opposed to 1,052 last year. *Bethnal Green's* issues have increased by 88,500, in spite of the closing of a branch with a stock of 7,000. *Islington* reports an increase of 85,000 over the year 1938-39, which was the highest in the history of the library. *Liverpool*, with an issue of 5,164,665, is steadily building up the stock which was depleted in air raids. It is good to hear that *Coventry* Library benefits by a bequest (from a former assistant at the library) to the extent of £1,693. This sum will eventually be used to stock the new Central Library.

Book stock is causing anxiety to most people. Books cannot be replaced, and re-binding is difficult. At *Bournemouth* 19,000 books have been discarded against 23,000 added to stock. The report from *Bournemouth* mentions a book policy (not explained) which aims at providing against future shortage. At *Kettering* there has evidently been a purge of "dead stock," and the removal of the charge on extra tickets for students has caused great satisfaction to serious readers.

Extension work is still going on, in spite of difficulties. The Lecture Hall at *Islington* has been let on 60 more occasions than in the year 1938-39, and concerts are also given. The lectures and art exhibitions at *Mansfield* have attracted an average

The Library Assistant

attendance of 230. At *Kettering* talks on books have been a regular winter feature, and the Library Committee was invited to a final discussion.

Work with children has not been neglected. At *Bethnal Green* the Junior Library has been re-opened at the Central Library. *Margate* reports an increase of over 100 per cent. in junior reading, and at *Gainsborough* winter story-hours were started and the children run their own magazine.

There are two book lists for children—quite an occasion. *Bethnal Green's* "New books for children" is in three alphabetical sequences: "Stories for boys and girls," "About real things" and "Fairy tales." This is the better list of the two, though in it Blyton, Johns and their like seem to hold great importance. *De La Mare's Bells and grass* and *Steed's That bad man* certainly need some explanatory note after the title. In *Islington's* "Six score books for boys and girls" there are several books which need not have been included. When a list is selective, it might as well select the best. *Gorman's Army of today* is not up to date, nor is *Golding's Wonder book of the R.A.F.* There are better anthologies than *The golden staircase* and finer junior books on nature study than *Out with Romany*.

Talk of junior books reminds me of the interesting brochure from *Newark* which has been issued to celebrate the sixtieth birthday of the Gilstrap Library. Mr. Gilstrap said in 1883, "The child will read something, and it is better that he or she reads books suitably chosen than inferior publications which are manufactured at a cheap rate."

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